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Security Force: Fiercely Loyal and Secretive

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LONDON — For years, they scurried like rats through secret tunnels in the belly of Bucharest.

Called the Securitate, they were the loyal protectors of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. His execution, reported Monday, robbed them of their boss but not what they saw as their mission. Fanatics among them are expected to fight to their own deaths.

"If they don't get captured or killed," predicted one longtime student of East European and Slavic affairs, "they'll commit suicide."

These were the most dreaded of Ceausescu's forces. Although some have surrendered, others have not been so easily defeated. They are clearly disliked even by the Soviets, whose official news agency, Tass, said with a hint of satisfaction that a number of them fled in retreat to "hide-outs among burial vaults" in the cemeteries.

Their total number was uncertain because some wore civilian clothes. Others wore uniforms that closely resemble the uniforms of the army. And still others have disguised themselves with armbands of the National Salvation Front, the new provisional government that said it executed both Ceausescu and his wife.

But it was widely believed that the Securitate numbered in the tens of thousands.

Some were handpicked from orphanages so that they would owe nothing to anyone but those who had selected them--and their loyalty would be absolute.

They got the best equipment, including armored cars and helicopters.

They received the toughest military training. Unlike the regular army, the Securitate was not assigned to help on building sites. Nor was it used as manpower in "militarized" sectors of the economy--such as in mines or at coal-fueled power stations.

Most important, perhaps, the Securitate got the best pay. Knowledgeable Romanians said that Ceausescu cemented the allegiance of the Securitate by paying members as much as three times the \$300 earned each month by average citizens.

As its initial assignment, the Securitate was charged with protecting Communist Party and government offices. But Gen. Ion Pacepa, who defected as head of the Foreign Intelligence Service in 1978, wrote in his memoirs that in later years, the assignment of the Securitate changed.

"Their actual duty became the physical protection of Ceausescu and his family against any foreign or domestic *coup d'etat*," Pacepa wrote, "including one originating with the Romanian military forces themselves."

During any such a coup, Pacepa wrote, the Securitate would be responsible, in addition, for preventing "the takeover of the national radio and television stations by (any) hostile forces."

Indeed, during the past several days of bloodshed in Bucharest, some of the fiercest fighting has been at Romanian television broadcast facilities. The television was taken over by anti-Ceausescu forces, who used live broadcasts to communicate effectively with the Romanian people.

Ceausescu also spread the Securitate throughout the country. One report, cited by Reuters news agency, numbered its battalions at 17 and said these forces had special access to information and supplies. The Associated Press said Ceausescu kept Securitate members in each of Romania's 40 counties and that some surrounded Bucharest in division strength.

"A very small group . . . have been trained (and) committed to the defense of Ceausescu at any cost whatsoever," said Mark Braine, a correspondent for the British Broadcasting Corp. with long experience in the region.

"They really are operating like guerrillas. . . . I can't see that the army is going to be able to stop them except by the fairly massive use of force," Braine said. "(But) it's impossible, really. . . . In the long run, there is absolutely no chance for the Ceausescu loyalists to win."

Dennis Delatante, who has made Romania part of his expertise at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies in London, agreed.

"Some of the presidential bodyguard will fight to the bitter end," he said. But he added: "I think we're very close to an end. . . . I think we're going to see the end within the next 48 hours."

It was the Securitate who had free run of secret tunnels, discovered late Sunday and early Monday, beneath Bucharest.

Soldiers who overthrew Ceausescu described the tunnels on Bucharest Radio as a vast network of passages crisscrossing beneath the city. The passages were stocked with arms, ammunition and electronic monitoring equipment. They seemed endless.

A 2.5-mile stretch ran from Communist Party headquarters and Ceausescu's new palace, "Casa Republicii" in downtown Bucharest, all the way up to a lake in the northern part of the city.

Some of the entrances were hidden behind plain-looking panels in the subway system.

As their tunnel system was discovered and some of the Securitate surrendered, army troops tried to prevent Romanians from lynching them.

In one instance, Tanjug, the Yugoslav state news agency, reported that 40 members of Ceausescu's security force gathered near the opera house in the city of Timisoara. Tanjug said army leaders appealed "to the people to stop completely any actions . . . for pointless revenge."